

**Amendments to the Claims:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

What is claimed is:

1. (cancelled)

2. (currently amended)      A flat sealing ring (1) ~~according to claim 1~~ for producing a fluid-tight coupling of two surfaces which are to be sealed against one another by means of a contact force, the ring (1) having an elastically deformable base ring (2), a stiffening ring (3, 3', 3'') for limiting compression of the base ring (2), and at least one protective layer (4), wherein the at least one protective layer (4) covers at least a portion of the base ring (2), wherein the stiffening ring is provided at at least one of the inner circumferential edge of the base ring (2) or the outer circumferential edge of the base ring (2), wherein the stiffening ring (3, 3', 3'') comprises hard plastic or metal and has, at least perpendicularly to the ring plane, a lesser deformability, or greater firmness, than the base ring (2), and wherein the height of the stiffening ring perpendicularly to the ring plane is less than the greatest height of the base ring (2) perpendicularly to the ring plane.

3. (currently amended)      The sealing ring according to claim [[1]] 2 wherein the stiffening ring is made of metal.

4. (currently amended)        The sealing ring according to claim [[1]] 3 wherein the stiffening ring is made of stainless steel.

5. (currently amended)        A flat sealing ring according to claim [[1]] 2 wherein the base ring has a core of elastically deformable material (6) and the at least one protective layer (4), at least in portions, is on the elastically deformable material of the core.

6. (cancelled)

7. (currently amended)        A flat sealing ring according to claim 3 wherein the base ring has a core of elastically deformable material (6) and the at least one protective layer (4), at least in portions, is on the elastically deformable material of the core.

8. (currently amended)        A flat sealing ring according to claim 4 wherein the base ring has a core of elastically deformable material (6) and the at least one protective layer (4), at least in portions, is on the elastically deformable material of the core.

9. (original)                A flat sealing ring according to claim 5, wherein the at least one protective layer (4) is produced from a chemically resistant material.

10. (cancelled)

11. (original)                    A flat sealing ring according to claim 7, wherein the at least one protective layer (4) is produced from a chemically resistant material.

12. (original)                    A flat sealing ring according to claim 8, wherein the at least one protective layer (4) is produced from a chemically resistant material.

13. (original)                    A flat sealing ring according to claim 5 wherein the at least one protective layer (4) is produced from a fluoropolymer.

14. (cancelled)

15. (original)                    A flat sealing ring according to claim 5 wherein the at least one protective layer (4) is produced from polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE).

16. (cancelled)

17. (original)                    A flat sealing ring according to claim 5 wherein the stiffening ring (3, 3', 3'') and the protective layer (4) are produced as a single piece from the same material.

18. (cancelled)

19. (original)                      A flat sealing ring according to claim 7 wherein the stiffening ring (3, 3', 3'') and the protective layer (4) are produced as a single piece from the same material.

20. (original)                      A flat sealing ring according to claim 8 wherein the stiffening ring (3, 3', 3'') and the protective layer (4) are produced as a single piece from the same material.

21. (new)                          A sealing ring (1) comprising:  
  
                    an elastically deformable base ring (2) having an inner circumferential edge and an outer circumferential edge; and,  
  
                    at least one stiffening segment (3, 3', 3''), wherein the at least one stiffening segment is connected to at least one of the inner and outer circumferential edges, wherein the at least one stiffening segment covers less than the entire inner and outer circumferential edges, wherein the at least one stiffening segment, at least perpendicularly to the ring plane, has a lesser deformability, or greater firmness, than the base ring, and wherein the height of the at least one stiffening segment perpendicularly to the ring plane is less than the greatest height of the base ring perpendicularly to the ring plane.

22. (new)                      A sealing ring (1) comprising:

an elastically deformable base ring (2) having an inner circumferential edge and an outer circumferential edge;

at least one stiffening segment (3, 3', 3'); and,

and at least one protective layer (4), wherein the at least one stiffening segment is disposed within the base ring in a circumferential direction and is at least partially uncovered by the base ring, wherein the at least one stiffening segment, at least perpendicularly to the ring plane, has a lesser deformability, or greater firmness, than the base ring, wherein the height of the at least one stiffening segment perpendicularly to the ring plane is less than the greatest height of the base ring perpendicularly to the ring plane, and wherein the at least one protective layer covers at least a portion of the base ring.